

26 August 2018

This week's homily. Please reflect on it this week and let the Holy Spirit speak to you. Have a blessed week.

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Twentieth Sunday – Ordinary Time – Year B

After Jesus sees many of His disciples walk away and leave Him because He spoke about the miracle of bread becoming His Glorified Body and wine becoming His Glorified Blood, Jesus turns to His Apostles and asks "Do you also want to leave". The faith of the disciples was at a crisis point. They saw many miracles worked by Jesus; the greatest being the feeding of over 5000 people with only two fish and five loaves of bread. All the miracles were confirmed by their sense of sight. It was easy to believe that Jesus did what He said. When Jesus' proclamation "I am the Bread of Life", and "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life", Jesus took the disciples to a deeper level of faith. They had to choose to either believe Jesus to be who He said He was, or they had to walk away from Him.

Jesus confronted them with the miracle that we know as the Divine Presence of Christ in Holy Communion. It was at this point that people either accepted Jesus at His word as being the Son of God, or walk away in disbelief. Jesus never changed the meaning of what He said. As a result, people walked away from Him. Jesus then turned to His Apostles and asked "Do you also want to leave". The question was not merely an inquiry. It was a challenge placed before them. I think we, as Catholics today, are facing a challenge of faith. It is not from Jesus but from the Church. Do we stay committed to Him through the Church or do we walk away?

In the Church we have experienced Jesus in our lives. We have been baptized. We have received Holy Communion. We have been confirmed. Some have received the sacrament of matrimony and some have been ordained. But in the last two decades the Catholic Church has experienced a crisis that is as scandalous as the Reformation. It is the sexual abuse in the report from Pennsylvania and the previous report around 2002 in Boston. The crisis has shaken up the faithful in regards to the Church. And since Christ is the foundation of the Church people's faith even in Christ has been shaken. I believe Jesus is still speaking to us through the Church and is saying "Will you stay?". For some people the response has been to walk away and answer Jesus' question with "No, I will not stay". To stay in the Church, believing Jesus is still its foundation seems to demand too much faith. To trust that Christ is still working through the mess that people have made is a challenge to one's faith. In staying in the Church and trusting that Christ is presence still leaves us feeling shame and pain for what has happened. As I reflect upon this crisis I envision Jesus, sadly looking at us and saying "Do you also want to leave?". Christ works through the institutional Church and it is the institutional Church that has let Him down and has let the people down within the Church.

Perhaps an analogy might help. Imagine Christ as the bright shining Sun and the Church as the Moon. The Sun is the source of light. As bright as the Moon is, it is lifeless without the Sun. In fact what gives the Moon light is the Sun. It can only reflect the light of the Sun. And when we look at the Sun it is always bright and producing light. Sometimes the Moon is a powerful reflection of the Sun, and at other times it wanes in brightness, and even becomes dark. It does not always reflect the light of the Sun. It appears dark and cold. That is the Church. It receives its light from the Son of God. But at times it loses its brightness. It loses its full reflection and becomes dark and cold. At the present time the brightness of the Son of God does not seem to be reflected in the Church.

The coldness of the Church comes out when the Church emphasizes itself as an institution, over the emphasis upon the Church being the People of God. The Church is more than an institution. It is a People.

It is to people Christ came to sacrifice Himself on the cross for. It is through the Church that Christ has chosen to work. Unfortunately, religious leaders in the Church have emphasized the protection of the institution over the service of people. In Jesus' time, the Religious Leaders sought to protect the institution of Judaism, and the people suffered. In Jesus' time, He honored the institution but emphasized the care of the people within the institution. Today's crisis reveals how people have been dishonored by the institution that is to reflect Christ Jesus and be a source of light and hope for them. Jesus still tells us that He is the Bread of Life and despite the horrible mess found within the institution He asks us "Do you also want to leave?". Our faith is being challenged at this hour in history. We need a miracle of healing today. Christ continues the miracle of healing through the Eucharist but those receiving the Eucharist must be the means through which Christ works to heal the brokenness found within the Church today. You, the laity must challenge us the clergy. In the 14th Century it was a lay woman, St. Catherine of Siena who challenged the religious leaders to reform the Church in chaos. Before that it was St Francis of Assisi, a layman, who was told by Christ to rebuild His Church. Perhaps it is the secular District Attorneys across this land and other countries whom Christ has put forth as the new Catherine of Siena and Francis of Assisi. Their actions are calling the Church as an institution to reform and be the Body of Christ that it was established to be. Just as Catherine and Francis made the religious leaders of the Church of their time face the scandals, so to, are the District Attorneys and victims making the institutional Church face its sinfulness. Amid the horrible crisis and mess I still believe Christ is present within the Church. I believe He is working through people who are not official religious leaders. And through them, as painful as it is, I believe Christ's words are being said to us: "I am with you always until the end of time." Perhaps our prayer might paraphrase the prayer of a man who requested healing from Jesus for his son. "Lord, I believe, but amid the pain and suffering from the crisis before me, please help my unbelief." Jesus came through for that man. I believe He will come through now. Amen.